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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 2598  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 3548

S E C R E T QUITO 000434

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: WHERE IN THE WORLD IS LENIN MORENO?

REF: A)07 QUITO 2651 B) 2007 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Classified By: DCM Jefferson Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Vice President Lenin Moreno has failed to carve out a significant policy role during the first 18 months of the Correa administration, and recent ill-health has further limited Moreno's role within the GOE. He remains popular with the public, but does not appear to have aspirations for the presidency in the future - in contrast to some more clearly ambitious senior figures of the PAIS movement. Rumors have started to circulate recently that Moreno may resign before the Fall, citing health reasons. If so, the jockeying to succeed him could be intense and revealing. End summary.

ON THE MEND

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¶2. (C) Vice President Lenin Moreno, a paraplegic with a history of health difficulties linked to the shooting accident that crippled him, was hospitalized on April 22 for a urinary tract infection and remained in intensive care for six days, then remained hospitalized for several more days. Though he returned to his office for the first time on May 5, the press continues to report that he has not resumed a normal work schedule. During his weekly radio address on May 10, President Correa said that Moreno had "suffered a small relapse". In his first television interview since his illness, Moreno stated on May 14 that he was feeling much better.

PRESIDENT MORENO?

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¶3. (S) In the months leading up to Moreno's hospitalization, discussion of Moreno's role within the Correa administration and his potential future aspirations had become something of a parlor game. Many officials within the GOE and in the international community took note of rumors that relations between Correa and Moreno had soured, and pointed to Correa's decision not to have Moreno chair cabinet meetings in his absence as an indication of his limited role within the government (ref A.) But sources close to Moreno felt that that was simply the Vice President's style. Moreno's Special Assistant for Public Affairs and Media Andres Michelena (protect) told poloff on April 17 that Moreno was "very comfortable working behind the scenes." Michelena said that Correa and Moreno spoke several times a week and that Moreno was pleased with his role working on social issues. At the time, Michelena said that Moreno "had no desire to seek the Presidency on his own, at this time", leaving a slight window for a possible change of heart.

¶4. (S) A change of heart appears to be much less likely,

given Moreno's growing health problems. Already confined to a wheelchair, embassy sources very close to Moreno said as late as May 12 that he has decided that he will not seek the presidency in the future. Furthermore, he has resolved not to resign the Vice Presidency at this time. However, if, as expected, the new constitution calls for Presidential elections, Moreno will not run for Vice President either.

SOCIAL CAUSE CONTINUES

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¶5. (SBU) Moreno remains committed to the social causes with which he has been associated throughout his political career. President Correa assigned Moreno upon assuming office responsibility for the National Technical Secretariat for the Development of Human Resources (SENRES), the National Council for Disabilities (CONADIS), the Council for Amazonic Development (CODA), and the Secretariat for Citizen's Solidarity, to which Moreno devotes most of his time. The Secretariat for Citizen's Solidarity has launched three major initiatives under Moreno's guidance: "Ecuador without Barriers" which promotes the social integration of the disabled (ref B), "Ecuador without Children in Prisons," which aims at protecting the children of incarcerated individuals (ref B) and "Smile Ecuador, We are Nice People," which promotes social cohesion and kindness through public service announcements. Moreno spearheaded a partnership program with Microsoft which provided information technology training for persons with disabilities and was the driving force behind Ecuadorian adoption of the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities. (Note: Ecuador's adoption the convention allowed it to go into force.) USAID has had a positive working relationship with Moreno on disability issues. Michelena told poloff on April 17 that Moreno remains fully committed to a major role in these initiatives.

COMMENT

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¶6. (S) Though Moreno confidants tell the embassy that Moreno will not seek national office in the next round of elections, this could change if his health significantly improves. Moreno's potential departure from the political scene would create a power vacuum close to the presidency. The rumor mill as to who Correa might tap to run with him on the next ticket has not fully geared up as of yet, but it undoubtedly will if it becomes apparent that Moreno will in fact remove himself from contention. All of this is brewing as the Constituent Assembly Committee on State Structures and Institutions debates presidential succession in the new constitution. Moreno remains very popular among the Ecuadorian electorate (as evidenced by the response to the prayer to his health offered at the Israeli National Day celebration on May 7.) With no President having successfully completed his term over the last decade, rule one of recent Ecuadorian politics has been "never ignore the Vice President." Although not in the inner loop of power, given his popularity, and his close relationship with the powerful Minister for Internal and External Security Gustavo Larrea, Moreno remains a figure important to watch and engage.  
Jewell